

# Nishtha Rural Health, Education & Environment Centre

## Activity Report 2009-10



Please visit our website: [www.nishtha-hp.org](http://www.nishtha-hp.org)

This year we are indebted to Aktion Regen for providing us with two years funding in order to take advantage of the good Euro-Rupee exchange rate at the time and the excellent interest rates for fixed deposits here in India. We therefore received Rs.37,38,034 into our account, half of which has been put aside in a fixed deposit for use in 2010-11. These funds have enabled us to carry out a full programme of activities throughout the year in the clinic and to run the community centre, the school project, the single women's programme and to produce a calendar for 2010 publicising our work. In addition we have received Rs. 413,442 from Nishtha UK Trust which mainly covers youth and children's programmes plus some emergency medical funding. We are also grateful to Tulsi Seva Trust for funds for our community health programmes and to Matthews Wrightson trust for their valuable contribution to our destitute fund.

### A Day in Nishtha Clinic

At 4.30am Dr Barbara is the first to wake up - she loves that time when it is very still and everyone is asleep. She goes to the kitchen and boils a kettle for hot water and lets the dogs out into the back garden. Then she walks through her garden to the Community Centre where she does two hours of yoga and pranayama (breath control) practice. At 7am, when Azaad, the night watchman is up and about, moving through the clinic checking on in-patients and making sure all is well, they spend time together working in the garden in the cool



of the morning. After her bath and puja she goes outside to her late husband's Shiva temple to decorate it with flowers. She then has breakfast before going to the clinic. The health centre is her primary focus – it was her husband Baba-ji's wish that she build a holistic clinic on his land and work with the poorest and

most remote local people. Offering a welcoming medical service within the rural community gives her access to the local people and enables her to raise awareness among them of issues such as hygiene, clean water, nutrition and women's reproductive health.

At 9 am, all the clinic employees gather in the waiting room to discuss the programme for the day. Today we found out that last night's storm caused some damage around the clinic and a big piece of bamboo fell onto one of the electricity lines. Our two maintenance men: Subhash and Suresh set out together with one of the volunteers to assess and fix the damage.

Rasma, having swept through the clinic prepares chai (Indian milk-tea) for the employees while the accountant Mohinder is sitting in the office together with Dr. Barbara checking through the staff payments. The clinic is run by 6 full time and 2 part time staff. Dr Kusum, our local doctor gets ready to receive the first patients visiting the clinic. During the year 2009-10 a total of 1,615 individual patients attended our daily clinic in 5,799 consultations.

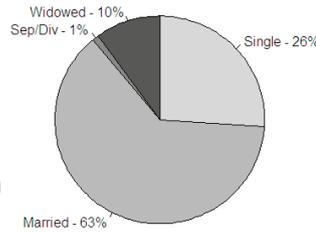
During the course of the morning, more and more patients arrive and take a seat in the waiting room. Most are poor - tribal hill people, subsistence farmers, slate miners, Tibetan refugees, itinerant labourers and sadhus (wandering holy men) from all over India and Nepal. If they have no money, we pay their costs. Twenty years ago, ours was the only clinic for miles and we were seeing up to a hundred patients a day, but now we see an average of 23 patients a day. It means we can talk to them, advise and demonstrate more. We are also shifting the focus of our work from primary health care to health education and special clinics. Recent dental and gynaecological camps have effectively reached into the community in areas where they normally get no medical help. This year we held a very effective Homeopathic seminar with Dr. Nandita Shah in October. It was attended by 5 foreign homeopaths who carefully considered and treated some of Dr Barbara's more complicated cases.

Each patient reports to Ram our dispenser who takes out their personal cards from the drawers where they are stored by village and then alphabetically and gives them a number to see the doctor. If it is the first time a patient has visited the clinic then he takes out a fresh card and registers their personal data. This year 592 new patients were registered. When the patient returns from seeing the doctor, he and Suresh fill their prescription, patiently explaining how and when to take their medicine and when to return for a check up. There are generally two kinds of patients: those who present with acute illnesses or injuries and those who are visiting the clinic for a post-treatment check. Some of these, like the young Nepali man who visited at 12 o'clock today to get the dressing changed on the wound he sustained two days ago during some carpentry work in his home, are attended to by Ram.

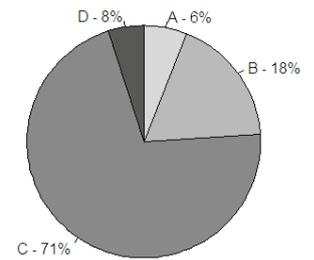
The clinic goes on until all the patients have been seen and the waiting room is empty. Fewer patients come in the afternoon and those that do often come from far, are acute cases or have appointments made with the doctors in advance. Rasma is replaced by Guddi, who starts her shift working in the clinic garden where she harvests



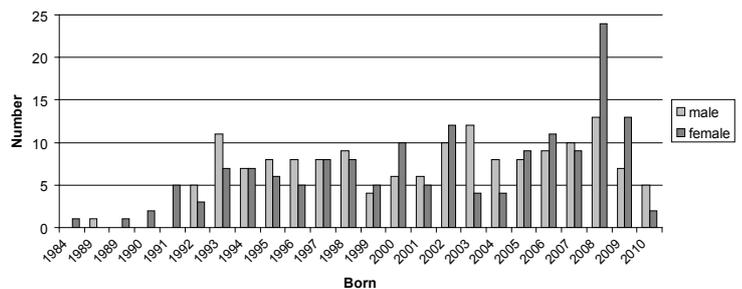
**Patient's Marital Status**



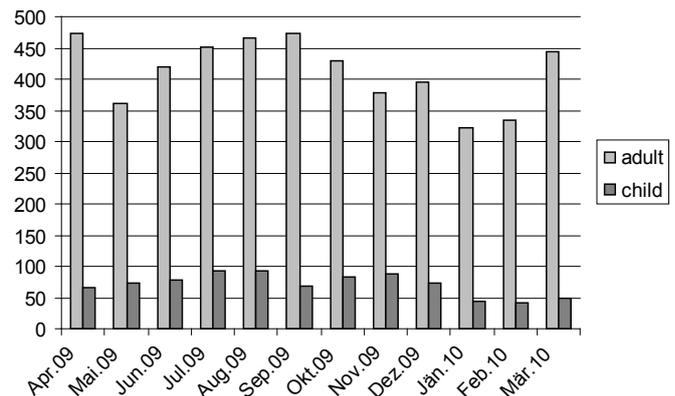
**Patient's Social Economic Status**



**Children's sex ratio**



**Patients per month - age ratio**



some tulsi and sets it to dry in the shade so that Suresh who is in charge of the herbal medicine production can use it in his cough syrup. Meanwhile Suresh climbs the ladder to the roof to check the water system and clean the filters. We provide clean water to most of the 1,600 residents of this village as well as to the school children, our patients, participants of our programmes and people from nearby areas. As a result, the incidence of gastroenteritis in the locality is very much reduced.



As well as the usual stream of patients who are kept in the clinic for observation and treatment for acute conditions, we often have long term patients who stay with us for months and even years. Jai Chand lived with us more or less continuously for two years as his heart and lung condition made it impossible for him to manage on his own and he had no family to care for him. Similarly, we have had a series of sick sadhus staying with us this year, in order for us to monitor their long term treatment and because they have no fixed place to be and get well. Some of our patients can be quite temperamental and difficult! We have also had a number of women with medical issues staying in our refuge this year. Dr. Kusum spends time between patients to visit them to check their condition and to have a chat.



Ram spends the afternoon updating the medicine database with the help of our Austrian civil service volunteer. We are very grateful to receive donations of medicines but it is very important to keep the records up to date so we ensure that we use them before their expiry date.

It is 3pm and the clinic staff gather for a meeting – today’s discussion has been called to plan the March 8th Women’s Day programme which is a programme of talks, plays, songs and dances on the theme of clean water. Over 200 women from near and far attend and it takes a good deal of organising and involves all our staff. The meeting is interrupted by a phone call informing Ram that there is an emergency in a nearby village and as the victim is not able to move, Dr. Barbara and Subhash leave the clinic in the Nishtha car to attend to the patient in her home. If she needs to be taken to hospital then our car and a staff will be on hand to assist.



At 5pm the clinic closes and everyone heads home. Barbara is back and discussing a letter from a potential new medical intern with Philippa, the administrator who has been working in the office with Mohinder on the accounts during the afternoon. They walk together across the newly built bridge that we at Nishtha have worked hard to achieve through fund raising within the community and helping with the construction. The bridge is used by up to 300 people a day to cross the river safely in the heavy monsoons. They walk through the fields as the evening draws on leaving Azaad locking up the rooms and again taking his post in the clinic for the night.



## Activities in Nishtha Community Centre:

The community Centre facility provides space for the sewing and computer trainings as well as being available for a wide range of programmes for the local youth and children. The workshop room is used in the early mornings for yoga and meditation, and later by the stitching women either for training or for the bag making programme. In the afternoons the cultural and kids programmes are held here and the bi-monthly youth club meetings take place. A variety of trainings such as Wenlido, health awareness, first aid and single women's meetings also take place in this room.

Funding for the utilities and maintenance of the community centre as well as the salary of our co-ordinator and cleaner are covered through Aktion Regen. Some funds from this account are provided for the library programme and to pay for the volunteers daily meal which is all Nishtha provides in exchange for their very valuable input. Last year we were fortunate enough to have an excellent young man called Philipp through the Austrian civil Service Programme, who was very helpful particularly in running the computer trainings for children and youth.

## Women's Programmes:

**Stitching class:** Last year 7 girls joined the stitching class which ran from April to December, though only 5 completed the year as one girl got married and one had a baby. This programme focuses on newly married and soon to be married young women from the local area. These girls were from Rakkar and Khaniyara villages and were between 20 and 28 years old. None of them had more than a very basic knowledge of stitching before they began the class with Maya Devi our stitching teacher so the class started with the basic instruction and practice in using scales, making patterns and how to use a sewing machine.

The first practical exercises are done by hand using newspaper instead of cloth. This includes stitching on buttons and hooks and mending torn clothes. Then the girls learn how to make the patterns for different kinds of garments, and how to cut the cloth properly. At last the girls learn how to sew garments on the sewing machine. They also become familiar with decorative designs, neck designs, underwear and different designs of pyjamas, kurtas, frocks, suits and blouses.

Some of the stitching group girls signed up for the computer class and came to the library to read newspapers and magazines. Five girls joined one of our Wenlido (self defence) trainings and some of them took part in the first aid training, the cultural program and the health classes as well as joining in the Nishtha computer programmes. At the end of the session, on the last day of January this year the stitching group went on an outing together with Dr Lata Shah, our volunteers Philipp and Andreas and Misro Devi, the Community Centre co-ordinator. They went to Pong Dam reservoir where they were able to see beautiful birds and go on a short boat trip.

Several women who have attended previous sewing courses have formed a group under Maya Devi who make bags and other small items for Dr Barbara to sell for fund raising purposes or to give to donors and friends as gifts. They meet regularly in the community centre to organise their work. They also make bags for specific programmes such as for Rakka mela where we set up a stall, environment day, women's day and for particular programmes like the homeopathic seminar to advertise our organisation and work.



## Single Women's Programme:

The aim of the single women' programme is to empower single women and establish local groups connected with a national body of single women. We work to increase the impact of single women's collective voice and to change society's stereotypes concerning them. We aim to pressure the central government to address the problems of single women, to enable women to benefit from government schemes, to provide legal help for single women and to encourage the women to help each other. We are actively raise our voices against violence towards single women and train them in Wendlido self defence.



*Single women's activist Deepa Gurung writes:* 'For the last three years Ravindra worked in Nagrota Block with the single women but this April I took over this work. Up until now we have been covering 30 village council areas in 3 Blocks (Kangra, Rait, Nagrota). Radha and Kummo Devi and I decided to take on a further 15 village areas, 5 in each Block. We have therefore had a very busy time: first identifying new villages, then meeting the village council members and the single women in the area and holding meetings. We found that after last year's march to Shimla almost everybody knows about the single women's group. We faced minor problems in a few villages but otherwise everything went very smoothly.

We held monthly meetings in every Council and six monthly Block level meetings. In Nagrota Block we organized a group meeting for the women of all the new villages we are working in and 60 women attended this meeting. Five women from each Block were sent for a three day leadership training in Sutra. Four women from each Block were sent to Shimla for a public hearing. They talked about their problems with the government officer. As 23rd June is Widow's Day, we organized a rally which 100 women joined and we met the District Commissioner. He listened to the women's problems and a few pension cases were solved. We held one big two day workshop in Nishtha for 38 women from all the new villages, led by Nirmal Chadhal from Sutra. She focused on domestic violence. All the women were very smart and active. In September we held a Wendlido workshop with 9 single women from Rait Block. On 1st and 2nd Jan Kummo Devi, Radha and I attended the three monthly meeting at Sutra. Workers from other districts also joined this meeting and talked about the public hearing and got feedback from each other about it's benefits. We from Nishtha agreed to hold one public hearing every six months. The next meeting will take place in April.

**Chart A: Nishtha Single Women's Groups Membership**

Location Block	31st March 2009 Meeting attendance	31st March 2009 Paid up members	Feb 1st 2010 Meeting attendance	Feb. 1st. 2010 paid up members
Nagrota	312	131	396	224
Kangra	364	156	432	384
Rait	256	150	403	238
<b>Total</b>	<b>932</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>1231</b>	<b>864</b>

**Chart B: Number of women who have benefitted from Govt. schemes through the groups**

Location Block	Pension	Marriage fund	Mother Teresa	Sewing machines	House repairing	Computer
Kangra	15	4	6	10	4	4
Nagrota	10	5	5	8	3	3
Rait	12	2	5	15	4	2

## Single Women's Health Education Programme

During January we held an intensive programme of health education meetings with single women's groups in the areas in which we work. The attendance at these meetings was not exclusively single women as many other women and even men expressed considerable interest in the classes. Deepa Gurung writes:

"On 4th January Dr. Lata, Dr. Kusum and I held a class in Sokni da kot, organized by Radha and attended by 30 women 10 men and 10 children. We presented the video which shows the body's organs from inside and how they work. Dr. Kusum talked about lice and distributed lice treatment, explaining how it is to be used. The following day we went to Rhmedh in Kummo Devi's area. Many of the single women were working on the employment scheme so were not available so we talked to a very mixed group of women and men about health issues, nutrition and working conditions. I explained about ECOSAN toilets and the food rights campaign. On 6th we went to Sunedh where the meeting was well attended by 55 people -8 men and single and other women. On 8th we went to Dhad and held a health programme after the single women's monthly meeting. Dr. Lata, Dr. Kusum and Nishtha supporters Kishwar Shirali and Sweta Sud came and talked to 34 single and married women. These women were very interested in the explanation about bacteria and how they reproduce. The young girls were also very intrigued because they had learned these things in school but they said this video presentation was so much easier to understand. On 12th we held a health meeting in Jingal village. One family in the village arranged everything for us -because it was cold inside we all sat outside in the sun for the discussion. All the women were very happy because for the first time they attended such a meeting and seen inside their bodies! We were very pleased with the people's response to these presentations and felt they made a real impact on their understanding of how their bodies work and how to stay well."



## Wenlido - Women's Self Defence Workshops

Our continuing programme of self defence workshops and trainings are led by Ravinder Kakar and Deepa Gurung. Workshops are held in the community centre for groups of local girls or single women on average once a month. In addition, this year our trainers have been invited to conduct a number of trainings for other organisations. In January 2010 they held two three day workshops with 16 single women in Udaipur, Rajasthan with an NGO called Astha. At the end the women said that they want each and every woman to experience such a workshop because, even though women deny harassment in the family to avoid bringing shame on their families, every woman faces problems of this kind in some way. From In February the trainers were in Dehra Doon with Astiva training another 16 women aged 15-36. Ravinder reports:

"Some of the participants of the group were working women and some were students. They were all from the locality but had never participated in such a workshop before and it took time for them to open up. During the first day we do a series of exercises to encourage women to draw boundaries – to realise when they can say no and how to generate distance between themselves and a threatening person. They also learn how to extract themselves from dangerous situations such as when an aggressor pulls their hair or scarf. Because most of the women had experienced such kinds of violence they were very interested to find simple ways to deal with them. On the second day, the participants shared their personal experience of violence. It really hurts to hear how much violence women face in their lives. We held a discussion which we have done many times before which aims to help people to understand that there are different types of violence perpetrated against women, especially in the home, not only in the form of sexual assault. The debate that ensued in this group was very interesting. After watching the presentation exercise on domestic violence most of them realized that this has already happened to them. The participants enjoyed the workshop a lot, particularly singing and dancing together. They said this time together made them feel very strong and confident. On the last evening they built a fire with the wood blocks they had broken with their hands during the workshop to convince themselves of their personal strength and sang and danced around the fire. "

From 21st and 22nd November 2009 we held a workshop for foreigners at Tushita Yoga Centre, McLeod Ganj. Nine women aged 37 to 62 participated in this workshop. "This group was very good in terms of talking about their problems and experiences. They gave us very positive feedback on each and every exercise and discus-

sion and said that these exercises are very useful for them. One of the participants was an elderly nun, who is in charge of a local nunnery and she said that she intends to set up such a course for her entire nunnery. All in all, the workshop was very successful and also a new experience for us.”

In March Nishtha Community Centre hosted the Wenlido trainers five day annual meeting to discuss their activities and share their experiences running workshops over the year. Fourteen members from India plus Geeta Ridda from Canada who pioneered this programme particularly in India and Sri Lanka attended this very intense and interesting programme. Ravinder writes:

“During the Milan we discuss particular difficulties and how to handle them. We practice new techniques, talk about challenges and successes and ways of handling difficulties and agree to any policy changes. It was a great opportunity for us to spend time with other trainers and practice our skills.”

We are very pleased that our trainers are being noticed and appreciated and that other organisations are inviting them to give trainings to their participants. It gives them a sense of worth and broadens their experience.



### Shelter cum refuge for women:

The shelter cum refuge has been in regular use this year by several very needy cases. Bimla Devi from Shahpur was referred to Nishtha shelter by Jagori Grameen who had become aware of her desperate home situation with a violent and mentally disturbed husband. She came with her son and stayed with us for two months until she decided to move elsewhere as her husband had located her.

Rama Devi, a single woman was referred to us through the single women’s group in Una. She suffered an accident in her home which fractured her spine and left her paralysed. She came to us with her daughter as she was completely unable to care for herself and needed intensive treatment including daily massage, acupuncture and physiotherapy from our visiting volunteer physiotherapist. When she left, Rama Devi was taken regularly to nearby Chinmaya Tapovan to receive physiotherapy in their clinic. During her 4 month stay at Nishtha she made remarkable progress and was much more comfortable and able to look positively on her life when she left.

In the early spring we took care of Tenzin (20) and Chokey (28), two recent Tibetan refugees; on the request of their Austrian sponsors as they have no family to take care for them. They stayed with us for about 6 weeks while they were waiting for employment. While they were with us Tenzin, who is a trained thangka painter, helped make new banners for Nishtha and Chokey who is a tailor, helped with our bags project. Another Tibetan refugee Dorjee Rabten (20) also stayed in our shelter for 2 weeks while he was receiving medical treatment.

Normal medical services for these patients are paid for though the clinic destitute fund and utilities and upkeep of the shelter are largely included in the community centre running expenses.



## Children's Programmes

### School Children's Nutritional Enhancement Programme

*'Despite impressive economic growth, India remains home to one-third of the world's undernourished children. From 1980-2005 real GDP per capita in India grew by 3.95 per cent per year yet between 1992-2006, the percentage of underweight infants under three in India only fell from 52 to 46 per cent.*

*'Normally we expect economic growth and improved nutrition to go hand-in-hand but at the current rate India will not reach the Millennium Development Goal - to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger by 50 per cent by 2015 - until 2043. By failing to reach this target, a further generation are condemned to the brain damage, poorer education and early death that result from malnutrition.'*

- Lawrence Haddad, Director of the Institute of Development Studies, UK.

Even though we live in a rural village area where no-one starves to death, where work is available and where the national Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is functioning, we still see that the majority of the children attending the local government schools are underweight.

Anaemia and poor nourishment are particularly common among the girls due to social behavioural patterns that favour the boy child and through lack of understanding about what foods are necessary for children to grow. Many children from poor families only get one meal in the evening with a breakfast of tea and chapatti left over from the night before. The Government programme to provide a midday meal in school for the children has been implemented since last year but the equipment, cooking provision and ration provided per child is lacking. Therefore Nishtha has bought equipment, provides additional food and supplements the school worker's salary to cover her extra work in cooking the dal, vegetables, tofu, raisins and coconut for kheer and so on that we provide daily, and for properly washing the dishes.

Tamara Hübinger – Nishtha community Centre volunteer writes:

'Every morning during the first break the children of the primary and middle schools receive seasonal fruits or vegetables provided by Nishtha. Salochana is in charge of organizing, preparing and distributing the fruits which are bought nearby or at the wholesale market in Kangra. At about quarter past nine, during the morning break, Salochana with the help of Misru Devi or a volunteer like me takes the fruits down to the school and distributes them. First the children of the middle school come to receive their fruits, always virtuously queuing up and greeting us politely. They are followed by the more boisterous children of the primary school. The peels etc. are collected in a bowl and taken back to the Community Centre to be composted.

What fruits and vegetables are given to the school depends on the season. During the summer, melons, bananas and cucumber are most frequently given; in the winter time bananas and oranges. Less frequently other fruits such as mangoes, grapes, apples, dates, chiku, peanuts or others are offered according to cost and availability. Watermelons and mangoes are particularly popular because many children don't get this kind of fruit at home as they are quite expensive for the local people and unfortunately many people, not realising the importance of feeding children home cooked nutritious foods, prefer to spend their money on unhealthy snacks like chips.

In addition, Nishtha provides the school with daal, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and other seasonal vegetables such as cauliflower and beans to supplement the midday meal cooked in the school to ensure that the lunch provided is wholesome and tasty. Potatoes, daal, tomatoes and onions are provided every 2-4 days. Yoghurt, tofu, oil, spices, ghee, gram, coconut, soap and other items are also provided as needed.'

**Book binding:** each year we ensure that the text books of the primary school children are bound in sturdy covers to ensure that they do not fall apart and become unusable throughout the year.

**The school toilets** are regularly maintained by a local woman paid and supervised by Nishtha. Good toilets a major factor in enabling girls to continue school after puberty.



## New Shoes for both Primary & Middle School Children

This year, through a kind donation for the purpose we were able to give all the school children a pair of sturdy shoes. We held a special day for the sponsors of the children's programme on 1st April 2010. The children welcomed the sponsors into their school and put on a cultural performance. They then were presented with their new shoes and enjoyed a special lunch.



### Kids club activities.

The children come to the community centre 3 days a week for the kids club. Ravinder holds reading sessions, she plays games, draws and they do lots of singing and dancing. Sometimes when the weather is bad they watch educational programmes from the TV or animal Planet which is a favourite. For 3 months (Jan, Feb & March) before the exams, we ran the tuition classes with the government school children to enable the very poor to do well in their exams.



## Library/Literacy Project

Ravinder, our programme facilitator has been engaged to take care of the library and literacy programme, to run the kids club and to assist in computer trainings for which she is now qualified having taken part in the Cisco training course. In the library, Ravinder receives and organises the periodicals, enters new books and keep the shelves in order, issues books to kids and youth, talking to them and encouraging them to read beyond their normal sphere of interest. She takes note of what people want and organises procuring it for the library. Both Nicola and Kishwar, both members of our supporters group, have spent useful time with Ravinder in the Library helping her to take a creative role in the development of the literacy project. She is now working with Tamara, an Austrian volunteer who is taking an active interest in looking at ways to encourage reading in the community.

### Tuition classes for school children

It is locally felt that it is important to help the government school children to study for their exams and to this end two youth club members, Vijay and Aryan volunteered to come 6 days a week for 2 hours in the afternoon for the 3 months leading up to exams in March. We began by inviting students from 6th to 10th class but in the end we had students up to 12th class. They formed 6 classes, with 8-10 students in each class and took 3 classes on alternate days while the other three classes were doing exercises on the other 3 days in a week. Altogether they taught 50 to 60 children maths, science and English. The tuition classes took place in the community centre and were assisted by the Nishtha volunteers. We fed the children a daily snack of banana, biscuit or a nourishing drink as they came to the class directly from school. The exam results are much better than last year with about 90% pass compared to 70% last year.

### Computer training:

Baskar, the Air jadi Trainer ran a Cisco computer training course for 16 young people, 8 from Nishtha and 8 from Jagori, in September 2009. This course was followed by a special 3 day teacher training session for Ravindra, Phillip and Bandna from Nishtha along with 3 participants from Jagori Rural. Ravinder and Bhandana are newly married women who did not come out top in the basic course but are interested in



learning, good with children and youth and keen to work. Most of the young men who took the cisco training are now working elsewhere or are at college. Since then, our qualified trainers have been holding regular courses for youth and children 3 days a week. Philipp, our Austrian civil servant left in January but he has been replaced by Andreas who is very good with computers and is taking an active role in the computer training programmes.



### Youth Programmes:

Nishtha Social and Environment club is a very active group of over 154 young boys and girls from 15 to 30 years old who meet together in the community centre twice a month. The youth club has been running with the help of Nishtha for the past 6 years. During these meetings we organise sports and other community centre programmes, we sit and share information and discuss environmental and local social issues. The club also plays a role in local governance, encouraging the common people, many of whom are effectively illiterate, to seek their due benefits from the government. Occasionally we watch a movie which has some relevance to a topic in hand and sometimes we go on outings. This year a group hiked up to old Chamunda temple and the girls formed a party who went to Pong Dam for bird watching.

Key activities:

- \* Planning, organising and preparing for sports programmes including engaging with the sports department district Kangra and the local village council to gain permission to extend our work on the sports ground and to get earth to improve the cricket pitch. .

- \* Practically engaging in environmental and disaster mitigation activities; tree planting, ground and river bed management, fighting forest fires and saving fish which had been flooded into the rice paddies. Club members have also been very effective assistants in the dog vaccination programme.

- \* Environmental clean up days are held every month, normally with the club members and the Rakkar school children. Everyone goes out with bags and collects all the plastic and non-biodegradable waste lying around. Segregation exercises are done in groups to help the children and youth to understand the dangers of throwing and handling certain waste. Glass and batteries are kept separate and treated carefully whilst plastic waste is kept for the rag pickers who come regularly to pick up everything they can collect to sell. Dirty and medical waste from the clinic is burned at high temperature in the incinerator twice a month. Despite all efforts to provide bins and encourage them to use them, the local shopkeepers are the worst at throwing their waste just outside their shops.

- \* Highlighting issues, attending local village council meetings (Amm Jelas) and engaging in local environmental issues such as campaigning against cementing the village waterways – a practice which is highly detrimental to the natural ecology.

- \* Involvement in Nishtha events: posting posters, spreading information and assisting during the actual programmes:



\* Involvement in the construction of a steel arched girder bridge across the Manuni Khud. Participating in meetings and organising committees, raising funds, keeping check on the work which started in September.



This year we participated in the construction of a bridge across the Manuni river along with a village committee specially set up for the purpose. This steel arched girder footbridge is an essential communication artery between the villages of Rakkar and Mohli, used by an estimated 250 people a day. A final effort from the youth club saw the two ends connected to the approach paths enabling everyone to cross safely. Funds were raised from the local community – even the poorest people gave 5 or 10 rupees. The Norbulingka and Dolma Ling Tibetan



Institutes each donated Rs.45,000, and Nishtha donated Rs.45,000 from our local fund as well as encouraging every visitor to the centre to donate and dedicating income from this year's women's day programme to the bridge. The government agreed to 1.45 lakhs being put into a 15-85% scheme, effectively increasing this sum to 9 lakhs. A total of 12 lakhs has been spent on the bridge.

\* Encouraging & enabling youth to attending workshops and trainings to extend their practical knowledge including a 3 day workshop on citizenship, leadership and environment at Jagori in November which was attended by 3 youth club members, and herbal gardening and organic agriculture trainings.

### Personal Health Awareness Workshops for Youth

During Dr Lata Shah's stay two single sessions were held with the youth club members. This was followed by a workshop for young boys which was intended to be three days but extended into a fourth. Dr Shah's husband Dr. Bhargav, a professional health educator came specially to give this workshop to the boys from December 18th to 21st. 25 young boys were shown excellent information videos and held guided discussions on how the body works, personal hygiene, nutrition and sexuality. On the 4th day, after extensive discussions the day before, Dr. Bargav showed the video on pregnancy, how the baby grows in the mother's belly. This stimulated a very interesting discussion on the difference between men and women's bodies. Many of the boys had previously no idea how a baby was born so this was quite an eye-opener for them and gave them more respect for women.



### Cultural Awareness programme

Nishtha cultural training programme aims to encourage awareness and interest and pride in young people in their local traditions. Local customs are very often submerged under the popular modern culture which encourages everyone to be much the same, destroying local identity. A weekly music and dance training session with Vijay who teaches folk dance and Bhandana who specialises in marriage songs was held from April to December. The principal participants are the young women involved in the stitching group, joined by young people involved in the computer trainings and other youth activities in the community centre. By October last year the girls dance group had become quite proficient and performed in full costume for the Irish (German clowns) group, during the single women's block meeting at Nishtha and during the December 31st Festival. After a break during January and February, they got together again to practice and perform for the Women's Day program and for the school nutrition donors group in April. These performances give the girls considerable self confidence and pride in their traditional culture. They enjoy it very much and it helps relieve the monotony of their daily lives.



## Mens Traditional Gaddi Costumes

At the request of the Social and Environment club members, this year we agreed to procure a set of six men's traditional Gaddi tribe costumes so that the boys could perform along with the girls. As it proved impossible to buy ready made costumes, we decided to go through the traditional process of making them ourselves, right from purchasing the wool from the shepherds to having the woven cloth stitched into costumes. Before we started this project we were aware that the traditional art of handling wool to make the Gaddi tribal costumes was dying, but we had no idea how hard it would be to find people who are still able to do all the necessary steps. This really is a last chance opportunity to document all the stages that go into making these wonderful garments. To have them in our centre for the young people growing up in this world of ready made garments, to experience the beauty of the completely hand made costumes will be wonderful.



Mohinder explains: "We bought 20 kilos of wool from a local shepherd. Wool has to be very carefully selected for quality and to avoid excessive wastage. We then took it to the carding machine which is in a village near Kangra. Traditionally this task would have been done by hand with a pair of wooden carders, but though we managed to buy some from Chamba, we could not interest anyone to use them and so we did what they all do now which is to take it to the machine. Then we found that it is no longer easy to find people to spin the wool – who really know how to do it properly using the traditional spinning wheel as used by Mahatma Ghandi. After much enquiry we found a small community of Gaddis near Kangra where three older women took on our job and they have gradually, through the winter, been spinning all 20 kilos.

Once it has been spin into balls of very fine thread the wool has to be plied – several thin threads are hand spun together using a drop spindle, to make a usable yarn. The older local shepherds are the only people who can do this so a number of them have been gradually plying our wool over the winter. It is a long and slow going process. As they are now moving up the mountain they are doing the work as they are tending their flocks on the mountainside. We hope to have this process completed before they move over the mountains to Lahoul in July. When the wool is ready we can set about getting it woven, which will again be done down at Kangra. Mohinder has taken samples of weave from several places and has consulted the elders who have shown him how to select a good one. The wool has to be woven to a lighter weight for our ceremonial dance dresses than for the jackets and traditional costume used by the shepherds on the mountainside.

The traditional ropes which are worn wrapped around the waist are made by twisting wool together to form a strong and practical length of rope for the sheperds to use in many ways. Again these are becoming more difficult to purchase but we were lucky to buy 5 good new ropes from the shepherds. These had to be dyed black as the natural wool colour is mixed."

## Public Health & Environment

**Tree Planting & Tree Guards:** We planted one set of trees around the Rakkar sports ground in July 2009 at the start of the monsoon, which unfortunately were destroyed by animals even though the boys had made a lot of effort to cover the young trees with thorny scrub. We therefore had to purchase a new set of trees in early September which we were only able to get with great difficulty from the local Forest



Department Nursery. These are all useful medical plants: amla (a tall beautiful tree which gives a valuable crop of fruits which are very rich in vit.C), rita (the soap nut tree), harad and bhera, the fruits of which are used in ayurvedic medicines.

We have been caring for these trees carefully through the dry winter months, covering them with steel tree guards and watering them regularly. Out of the 11 planted 7 have survived. The others will be re-planted in August. 100% survival rate is not usual on this ground perhaps because of the soil or insects but we hope to persist and get 11 large beautiful trees established around the sports ground eventually!



## Maintenance and Repair:

In the spring we repaired, replaced and painted the garbage bins and the children's play centre. We also regularly maintain the three filtration units installed by Nishtha in the area to provide clean water to the local people. These are cleaned every week or more during the monsoon by clinic assistant Suresh, and twice a year the supplier for Delhi comes to change the filters and service the units. Our filters provide 5,000 liters of water a day and are used by around 400 people who collect it from their nearest tapping point. People really value this provision and take care to turn the taps off so as not to waste it.



## Ecosan toilets

In the village it is now compulsory to have a toilet and the Panchayat (village council) is after the people to make them build them otherwise they are not eligible for NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) employment and for subsidised food rations. However, the pits they are constructing neither feed into a main sewage system nor are they effective septic tanks. They are mere holding chambers which will quite soon leach raw sewage into the fields and waterways. Our dry composting eco-san toilets are an efficient and effective solution for the local village people and have been approved by the village council.

We have now established 11 eco-san toilets in the surrounding area. These are urine diversion, dry composting toilets and have been designed around the 3 hole ceramic Indian pans procured from Ahmedabad. The idea is to provide poor families, particularly women, with personal toilets, to stop wasteful use of water, which is becoming ever more scarce in this Himalayan region, and to provide nutrition for use on crops and avoid the need for chemical fertilisers.

The recipients were carefully screened with single women and very poor families given preference. Most recipients provide locally available materials: gravel, sand, stone and bamboo as well as labour according to their capacity. However, some of the elderly and infirm received more materials and extra labour. We tried to set up the toilets in places where they are visible to other people from the village, so that the idea of eco-san toilets spreads. People who have their own gardens were also favoured so that the waste from the toilet can go directly into agriculture. All 11 toilet units are in the Rakkar, Khanyara area where they can be monitored. We were very fortunate to have been able to procure excellent old wooden doors and tin roofing sheet from the army camp where they are demolishing the old barracks built during British times. As a great deal of continuing work is to be done to educate and facilitate the use of the toilets, the number built includes one model toilet for Nishtha and one for Jagori in the Tara Centre which will act as demonstration units. An extended programme to monitor and give advice about the use of the toilets is underway.



## Stabilised Mud Brick Making

We were very excited last year when we were donated two TARA brand stabilised mud brick making machines and we planned a programme to train 7 village youth in making these very viable bricks which are a good alternative to the regular baked bricks which are not only very expensive but also environmentally unsound. It is a great shame to see plumes of smoke over the Punjab from the many unmonitored brick kilns which must be greatly contributing to global warming in this sensitive Himalayan region.

We have worked hard to set up the machine, procure the right kind of earth and find people who not only expressed an interest but also were happy to engage with the project, learn and work. The final challenge was getting a knowledgeable mason who had worked with these machines before and getting the machine greased up and working. Finally we have trained 7 boys and are able to produce 150 bricks a day with 3 people working at a time. We estimate that each toilet will take 800 bricks and the cost of construction will be Rs.2,200 in labour.



## Dogs Clinic:

Rabies is a very serious threat to the lives of people in this area. There is a huge increase in stray dogs due to the reduction in the vulture population who used to clean up most of the waste food and carrion. Now packs of dogs roam the neighbourhood threatening house dogs, cattle and the local people. Even this year in September, four local people died of rabies and several more were successfully vaccinated after being bitten. Therefore we have been carrying out the rabies awareness and vaccination programme very actively and with the help of a local vet and our trained dog catchers we have, since September, vaccinated 63 local dogs. This number includes 23 pet dogs. Although we can say that nearly all the dogs in the locality are now vaccinated, we are continuing to hold monthly vaccination programmes as it is essential to keep this up this programme on a regular basis as new dogs turn up all the time. Our clinic is also kept stocked with rabies vaccines for humans so we can give the life saving injections as soon as possible after contact.

During youth club meetings we talk about the steps to take when you are bitten by a dog that might be rabid to make everyone very aware. Many local people feel that it is better to go to a local shaman to prevent infection after dog bite than to suffer the expense and pain of several injections. This attitude is very hard to overcome but by educating the younger people we hope that the older members of the family might be influenced to wash the wound, isolate the dog and come to the clinic for injections, as well as visiting the shaman if they feel it is beneficial.

## First aid and Disaster Management:

Mohinder, assisted by Deepa and Philipp held one first aid training in October with the Nepali Women's group from Sidhbari in the community hall on Rakkar Road. 30 ladies attended and were enthusiastic to learn all the basic knowledge Mohinder could give them from how to put someone into the recovery position to how to treat burns, cuts and broken bones. The session on baby care was very popular and they said they felt it was particularly important and useful.



## Sports Programmes:

Sports are very popular with the youth in the area and we have great support from them for our sports club. Around 35 youths play every evening in the ground. In the rainy season we cannot play cricket because of wet ground so we have formed a football team in the village. Football is also a popular alternative for those who do not like cricket. Nowadays 30% of boys are not going to collage because they have family responsibilities or because they are not happy with the education system which provides them very little that is actually useful to them and is difficult for their families to afford. In the end, the majority of young boys are doing labour work which is very physically taxing and depressing. Consequently they are drawn to the liquor shop in the evenings on their way home along with the rest of the workers, so alcoholism is big problem here. Many poor families are supplementing their income by producing local liquor which is cheap to buy but very dangerous. This is why our programme to involve these boys in sports is so important.



After the rains we cleaned the bushes from the area, levelled the sport's ground and prepared the volleyball court. In October, the cricket pitch was also re-set after the rains.

Permission was granted by the village council during the Amm Jelas (public meeting) on 3rd and 4th October. Three tractors of red clay were then brought from the forest land. The earth was dug and loaded by the youth club boys so we only paid the transportation of the clay. The pitch was prepared and rolled by the boys using a cement pipe packed with stones and cement. It was quite hard work. Then they were able to use the ground every evening for practice before the big sports festival in December.





**Girls Sports:** The girls are generally neglected by society and consequently are hard to motivate to play sports and games. To try to address this we have started a games hour for girls after school. A girl's cricket team was formed in Khanyara village with 14 girls. They are active and keen to participate in the winter sports programme and so practiced every Sunday. A bat and cricket balls were provided for them.

**Sports Festival Week:** In December the Youth club members set about collecting funds for our big annual sports event: the end of year sports programme. This year the programme went really well - 20 cricket teams from 12 villages participated in the tournament including four girls cricket teams from two different villages. There were also two girls volleyball teams and six boys teams from different villages. Six girls and four boys badminton teams also participated in the tournament. Refreshments were provided to the participants during the games and other performances.



30th December was devoted to open athletics and indoor games including chess, carom and ludo for children and young people. Although the numbers of boys taking part were much more the girls, girls won 25% of the prizes. Prizes were presented by Dr Kusum and Dr. Lata Shah who encouraged the players, especially the girls to continue playing sports. The event was immensely popular in the village drawing around three hundred people daily for the seven days. The participants made friends from other villages and enjoyed themselves and other people who usually sit around gambling and drinking also spent their days in the playground. People realised the value of the sports and playgrounds and the engagement of the village helps to protect this endangered common land from encroachment.



On 31st December evening we celebrated New Years Eve with a 3 hour festival of songs dances and plays held in the Rakkar Primary School. The youth club performed a play on sanitation and global warming. Three local folk singers sang local folk songs, a group from village Chuhla performed a Gaddi dance and about 10 individual artists entertained the people with traditional folk songs and dances. Nishtha cultural group performed a dance which everybody enjoyed and joined in as a finale. This event is providing a stage for young local artists to develop their performance skills as well as providing an opportunity for them to make friends and feel proud about their culture.



We continue to play cricket every evening – Nishtha supports the programme with equipment and balls and we encourage the girls to also practice on Sundays. The ground is also used daily by the school children during their breaks. In March the play-centre underwent extensive repairs to the slides and re-painting. It continues to be a popular focus for the children of the area.



## Special Events

**Right:** The Irish clowns troupe from Germany delighted us with their programme at Rakkar school in October. 300 children from various local schools attended this wonderfully interactive programme.

**Below: Women's Day:** Nishtha celebrates this special day with a programme of speeches, songs, plays and dances for all our local women. This year our chief guest was Putli Devi, an activist single women and our theme was clean water and domestic violence.



## Nishtha Calendar

Nishtha 2010 calendar featured children and youth. This year we celebrated the 20th anniversary of Aktion Regen, an Austrian aid organization founded in 1989 by the Viennese gynaecologist and development aid worker Dr. Maria Hengstberger. With the support of many small donors "raindrops" they focus their activities on the establishment of health centres and clinics in developing countries and in supporting special projects for women. We are grateful to be one of their special projects.

## Administration:

In September last year we bought a new computer for the office. All the accounts, the main archive of photographs and reports as well as the patient database are stored and worked on this platform. Analysis of the demographic data base which was re-started in May 2009 is presently being undertaken by our volunteers.

**In Memorium:** We very much regret the passing of our longest serving trustee, Mrs Monica Ghosh on 2nd May after suffering a stroke. Dr Barbara immediately attended her at her house where she had fallen in the kitchen, and took her to Tanda Medical College Hospital where she was admitted. After 3 days she was discharged from the Government Hospital and admitted to Nishtha Clinic where she was cared for until she peacefully passed away at 10.30 am on 1st May. Her husband and two of her sons were able to spend quiet time with her in the clinic and carried out the cremation. She was 87 years old.

Nishtha is governed by a board of Trustees which meets 2-3 times a year. As people who are suitable or could take on the responsibility of being a trustee are hard to find, in order to involve more people and gain their helpful support the board decided during their meeting in October that we should create a supporters group. Seven long time friends were invited to join including ex trustee Kishwar Shirali and Sonia Sebastian, a local young woman with excellent contacts in the wider community. This supporters group has been meeting regularly, involving themselves in our projects in whatever capacity they can. Their help has been much appreciated by the staff and administration of the Trust.

